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The End of Times: Do Scientists and Fundamentalists Concur?



By Clay Farris Naff

You might think that scientists and Evangelicals have nothing in common. But you'd be wrong. Large numbers of both agree on one thing: the end is near.

A few years back, Sir Martin Rees, Britain's Royal Astronomer, published a book titled [Our Final Century](#), in which [he put the odds of human survival through this century at no better than 50-50](#). Now, biologist Frank Fenner, who played a key role in ending the scourge of smallpox, says the end is certain.

Surveying the carnage humanity has inflicted on the ecosphere, the 95-year-old Australian scientist says nothing can change our fate now. ["It's an irreversible situation," he's quoted as telling the press. "I think it's too late."](#)

Many of the best-informed scientists agree [that we have left it too late to prevent anthropogenic climate change from bringing on a global catastrophe](#). Whether this results in actual extinction or merely the ruin of civilization is a matter they are still debating.

Fundies entertain no such doubts. Preacher Tim LaHaye and his potboiler copilot Jerry Jenkins have made a vast fortune describing the gory biblical end they gleefully anticipate.

fiction. In a recent Fox News interview with Governor (and former Republican presidential candidate) Mike Huckabee, LaHaye says the End Times are due to start, and that President Obama’s “socialism” is speeding the day:



It would be nice to think that LaHaye is a lonely loon, spouting nonsense for fun and profit, but a [Pew Center report finds that nearly 60 percent of white Evangelicals believe Jesus will be back in town any day now — and most definitely within the first half of this century.](#)

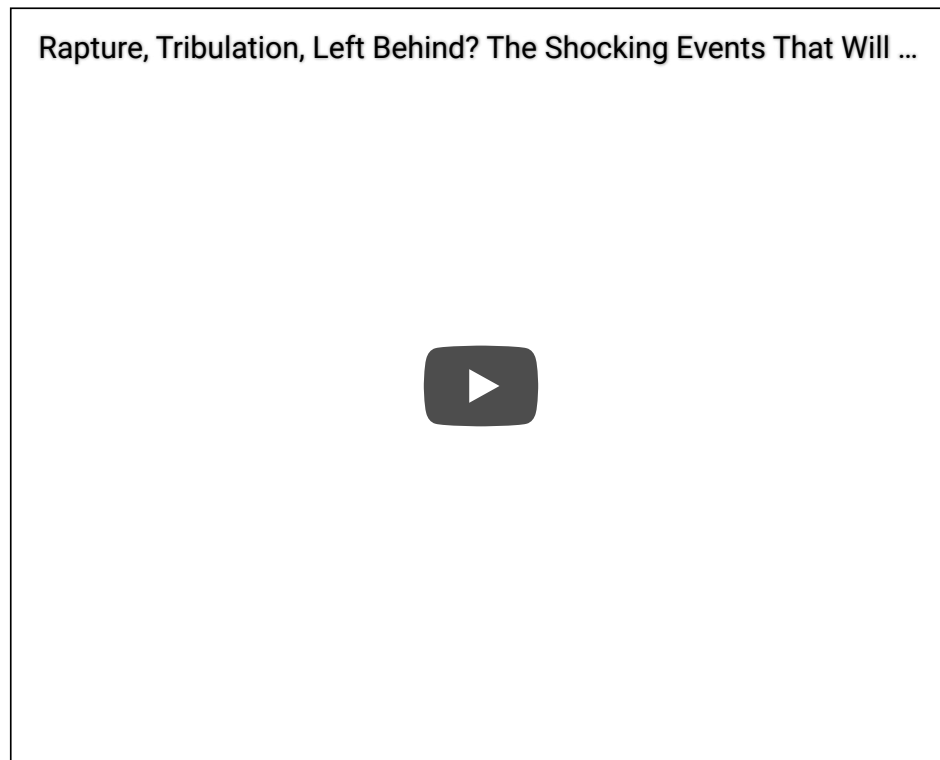
There are two major differences between these doomsday criers. First, scientists base their conclusions on a systematic review of evidence in the real world. Evangelicals rely on that hall of magic mirrors called biblical prophecy. Funny thing about the Bible: you can read whatever you want into it.

Take LaHaye, for example: He thinks that a) the Bible prophesies that four global empires will arise, and that b) four global empires have arisen. Bingo! It’s Armageddon time! Never mind that the Bible authors thought the world was flat and had no idea that empires existed in China or Meso-America. LaHaye’s got it all taped out. Never mind that there has never been a truly global empire. (The Brits came closest, but even they controlled only a fraction of humanity.) It’s all in the interpretation!

Second, scientists generally deplore the extinction of megafauna (including us). Some even gnash their teeth, and for all I know, rent their garments. Physicist Bob Park is a good example. In his weekly newsletter [he cries out like a prophet in the wilderness about our failure to recognize the dangers of overpopulation.](#)

Evangelical doomsayers, on the other hand, say “bring it on.” They are elated by the thought

suffer torment below. They even welcome climate change as part of “God’s plan.” Check out the scorching sun and 100-pound hailstones in this slick video:



It would be bad enough if Evangelicals merely fantasized about the End Times. But they and their counterparts in the world’s other major religions fan the flames. The [QuiverFullers](#) push for big families at a time when our resources are redlining, jihadists commit atrocities in hopes of sparking a global religious war, Jewish settlers claim God’s backing for their abuse of Palestinians, [Hindu radicals bomb](#) mosques and churches, and on and on it goes.

Is it any wonder that some scientists believe the end is near and that religion is to blame? Perhaps not. But they are, I trust, wrong.

The end is not certain, and religion *per se* is not to blame. I have lived long enough to know that problems are far easier to define than solutions. I grew up under the shadow of the Bomb. [Dr. Strangelove seemed like a realistic scenario then.](#) No one could have reasonably predicted the peaceful, internal dismantling of the Soviet Union. By the same token, I suggest, we must not assume that religion, which was, I believe, [an adaptive institution in our past](#), will not evolve into a benign institution in our future. It can and must, and people of good will and sense need to help it along — from inside and out. There are [some encouraging examples out there](#).

This does not mean, of course, that we can stop worrying about the Population Bomb, or the consequences of our fossil fuel binge. What it does mean is that we must not give up hope.

machine, for instance; it's against the laws of physics. But unless we write our own statute of doom, human survival beyond this century violates no law of God or nature.

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